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# Wealth, Poverty, and Vocation in the Life and Times of Claude-François Poullart des Places

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## WEALTH, POVERTY, AND VOCATION IN THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CLAUDE-FRANÇOIS POUILLART DES PLACES

Pierre Thomas (1687–1751) was one of the earliest companions of Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679–1709), and was his first biographer. His account of the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit's life dwells on two things: the struggle against worldly ambition that brought Poullart des Places to his vocation, and the self-abnegation that he embraced once he had entered into that vocation. His experience of poverty summed up both of these strands:

*Before his conversion, M. des Places would not have found the allowance that [his father] gave him enough for his own needs; once converted, he found it enough for himself and for seeing to the needs of many others, so ingenious does charity joined to the spirit of mortification make one at finding even in one's necessities a kind of surplus to give to the poor. He hoped one day to see himself stripped of everything after having given everything away, and to live only from alms.<sup>1</sup>*

Thomas considered this conversion from worldly wealth to spiritual poverty exemplary, a guarantee both of the founder's personal religious progress and of the foundation's roots in divine rather than human will. But Thomas would not have been alone in his day, for he echoed concerns that both he and Claude-François would have encountered many times in their youth.

In the final decades of the Sun King's reign, many French men undoubtedly entered into Holy Orders with little serious reflection, merely because it seemed to them or their families to be the easiest or most advantageous of the careers open to them. "People enter Holy Orders on their own whim," according to one particularly severe commentator, "and look on them as steps to climb up, to get to the jobs to which their ambition draws them. They pursue the most important ecclesiastical dignities, and use all their credit, and that of their relatives and friends to get them; sometimes, they even make use of very shameful tactics."<sup>2</sup>

This, however, was not the way it was supposed to be. The plentiful and widely-read French moral and devotional literature of the years around 1700 made it clear that any vocation in

life, and particularly a religious vocation, was only to be entered into in the most serious and disinterested spirit, consulting the promptings only of God, nature, and one's spiritual director.<sup>3</sup> It is of course almost impossible to say how many people took this advice, but some surely did, and the available evidence strongly suggests that Claude-François Poullart des Places was among them. Looking at his career in light of contemporary religious culture can help to fill in some of the many gaps in our understanding of the Spiritans' earliest history.<sup>4</sup> It suggests, in particular, that Thomas was right in believing that des Places was led to his particular vocation in part by his complex relationship to the way wealth and social standing operated in his society.

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In 1700, France was a deeply Catholic country; more so, probably, than it ever had been before or ever would be again.<sup>5</sup> Over a century of enthusiasm, spiritual and mystical development, and institution-building had produced an exceptionally active and engaged Christianity, shared by a broad elite and increasingly integrating the longstanding piety of the rural and, to a lesser extent, the urban poor. Protestantism, outlawed with the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes, was hardly even a marginal force. If 1700 marked a high point, though, one would expect that the seeds of decline were already germinating, and indeed this was the case. The victory over Calvinism would prove pyrrhic, identifying the Church with bigotry and repression rather than any more Evangelical qualities; more immediately, the Jansenist controversy, which had been going on for more than a generation, had begun to inflict serious damage. It would lead to schism in the Netherlands in 1706. In France the schism was spiritual rather than organizational, but no less real for all that, and rather than taking sides the French public was beginning to become disgusted with the entire enterprise of Catholic theology. And the proliferation of mystics and mystical theory that had characterized the century was also giving way to a backlash, most dramatically in the campaign against the "quietism" of Miguel de Molinos and Mme. Guyon, and against its most prominent French defender, François de la Mothe Fénelon, whose advocacy was condemned by a papal bull in 1699.

Given even this very abbreviated catalogue of issues, it is no wonder that a serious and pious young Catholic Frenchman coming of age in the years around 1700 would feel a combination of elation and anxiety at the prospects for his religion. Even for the most pious, though, other aspects of the contemporary situation would also have seemed enormously significant. In particular, if the seventeenth century had been good for the

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Gallican Church, it had been very bad for the French economy, which had stagnated at best since about 1620; and if the dawning eighteenth century promised religious difficulties, it threatened economic disaster as harvests failed and Louis XIV's long series of increasingly costly and increasingly unsuccessful wars came to its climax in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1714). Seventeenth-century France boasted one of the least egalitarian societies the West has ever known, but by the end of the century even French elites had become concerned by the levels of poverty and inequality they were seeing. Their concern was heightened by the fact that much of that elite had obtained its wealth and its status as officials and nobles in ways that were widely seen as more or less illegitimate: through participation in the oppressive, opaque, and corrupt world of the royal finances, and through the purchase of royal offices.<sup>6</sup> François Poullart des Places, Claude-François' father, was a wealthy financier who hoped (as Thomas very plausibly has it) to claim or reclaim noble status by purchasing a royal office for his talented son.<sup>7</sup>

As he considered his vocation, then, Claude-François did so from the perspective of the son of a rich but socially insecure man in an increasingly impoverished society. He would not have lacked for advice concerning the dilemmas he faced; the perplexities of the rich Christian were a popular subject of pious literature, partly for the purely commercial reason that the rich were likely to buy advice books, but partly for the more profound one that much of the French Catholic elite naturally came from the wealthy classes and had a personal interest in their spiritual problems. By the end of the seventeenth century the medieval impulse to condemn wealth out of hand, always somewhat marginal, had almost completely vanished, but Claude-François would still have found plenty of warnings against its dangers, and much encouragement towards some level of voluntary poverty. His Jesuit mentors, not generally known for fleeing the world, cherished the memory of Pierre Lallement (1587–1635), who “loved poverty, which the world usually avoids. As soon as he undertook to follow Jesus Christ, he wanted for his own use only those things that were absolutely necessary, and the nastiest, oldest, and least comfortable ones in the community.”<sup>8</sup>

A more contemporary figure, very influential in the field of ecclesiastical education in Paris, was the Oratorian Louis Thomassin (1619–1695). At his funeral, his pastor “announced something he had had to keep secret until then, that every year Fr. Thomassin gave him half of his thousand-pound pension for the poor.” And he had “other virtues that he hid no less carefully. Though he

*was fastidious by nature, he loved poverty in his clothing, his furniture, and everything to do with himself; and he would have preferred never to witness the distinction that the dignities of some of his family gave them in the world.”*<sup>9</sup>

Thomassin’s family was indeed distinguished, dominating the robe nobility in Provence. A cousin of the same name was bishop of Sisteron, distinguishing himself by the vigor of his attacks on Quietism and by the manner of his death (he was crushed when a wall of the episcopal palace collapsed).<sup>10</sup> And he shared the simultaneously empowering and embarrassing trait of a socioeconomically prominent family not just with Poullart des Places, but with the vast majority of the great names of the Century of Saints.

*...consider a canon of the church of St. Etienne in Dijon, Benigne Joly (1644–1694), who earned a reputation as “the father of the poor.”*

To give one more contemporary if somewhat obscure example, consider a canon of the church of St. Etienne in Dijon, Benigne Joly (1644–1694), who earned a reputation as “the father of the poor.” His family was prominent among the magistrates of Burgundy and was related to the Joly de Fleury of Paris, who in his day included the very prestigious solicitor-general of the Parlement.<sup>11</sup> Benigne’s wealthy father had purchased Benigne’s benefice when he was still very young, a circumstance that caused his biographer some embarrassment. To neutralize this affront to the ecclesiastical estate, the biographer goes into great detail about how Joly prepared for Holy Orders “by repeated retreats, which he made at different times and in different places; but not until after having questioned the mouth of the Lord, that is, after having taken the advice of those who saw most clearly the ways of God, and in particular of his pious [spiritual] director ... without whose wise advice he was careful never to make any choice as important as that of the estate on which the peace of his soul and the outcome of his eternal salvation depended.”<sup>12</sup> Joly, we are told, was only with difficulty persuaded to take up his benefice rather than becoming a poor rural missionary; once in that position, he used it to establish in Dijon a group of Lazarist missionaries and a “*petit séminaire*” for the instruction of rural priests.

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The parallels between Joly’s biography and Claude-François’ career are striking. Both seem to have been spiritually dissatisfied with the career strategies their families developed for them. Both turned to retreats for guidance, as contemporary tracts always advised: “When you need to consider something as important as choosing an estate or a job, it is useful to retire from the embarrassment of the world and of the occupations that distract us to make a retreat of several days. For, besides the fact that we need calm and repose to

*deliberate a matter as serious as that, the Lord himself tells us that it is especially in solitude that He speaks to the heart, and makes His will known.*"<sup>13</sup>

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In Claude-François' case, the single most revealing documents we possess about his spiritual development are the reflections he wrote while on retreat considering his "état de vie"; by far the most intimate and personal document he left behind, it is also very much a reflection of his age and his social context. In particular, it illustrates the rather subtle way in which Claude-François navigated between his moral and spiritual imperatives and his family's strategies of social advancement.

He was clearly convinced that worldly considerations should have no place in the choice of a vocation, but at the same time he seemed confident in his ability to set them aside, asserting *"that I have achieved a great indifference towards all estates."* This indifference presumably came more easily for him because (as he claimed, and as the subsequent course of his life certainly seemed to bear out), he was *"fairly indifferent towards wealth," "greatly loving almsgiving, and naturally sympathetic towards the misery of others."*<sup>14</sup> Indeed, contemporary moralists taught that the rich *"may ... possess goods and family wealth; but they must do so with detachment so that their tranquility is not troubled by them."*<sup>15</sup> And almsgiving and sympathy for the poor were at once a means toward and a fruit of such detachment. *"And who better than the rich to buy Heaven and acquire the virtues that lead there, above all charity towards the poor?"* asked a perhaps rather over-enthusiastic Italian Jesuit in a tract that went through three French editions in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> Poullart des Places, though, by no means felt that this exempted him from moral danger, for if relatively indifferent to wealth he was *"greatly impassioned for glory and for everything that can raise one man above others by merit."*<sup>17</sup>

Such ambition was in fact seen as close kin to avarice, *"for though cupidity seems to be divided among honors, pleasures, and riches, which it loves blindly, one can nevertheless truly say that avarice alone includes all of them, since we do not love riches for their own sake but because they are the instruments that bring us worldly honors and sensual pleasures."*<sup>18</sup> Practically speaking, the system of venal office made a desire for money and a desire for public prominence inseparable since, unless one was born into a noble and wealthy family, only cash gave access to the positions and prestige that were the prerequisite for glory and recognized merit. There was thus no straightforward way for Claude-François to

evade engagement with wealth when considering his vocation; his ambition would require him to maintain and extend his father's lucrative activities.

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And one thing Claude-François clearly did not want to do was to cast aside his father and his father's affairs. One reason he gave for rejecting his impulse to join the Carthusians was that *"my father is old and will leave behind him considerable business that few besides myself are capable of putting in order."* His only comment on the possibility of following his father's career in the royal finances was that the estate *"is not at all to your taste"* (addressing himself in the second person), whether that distaste was based on moral qualms, fear of social opprobrium, or merely a dislike of accounting was a question Claude-François did not broach even in the intimacy of his spiritual reflection.<sup>19</sup> This tolerant and cautious attitude certainly did not betoken any lack of religious sensitivity; on the contrary, among upwardly mobile French families of the time, filial piety was inextricably bound up with piety towards God the Father and the Mother Church.<sup>20</sup> This tendency drew not only on the obvious scriptural and theological sources, but on the structure of French society itself. The monarchy, which served as the source of both authority and social advancement, was seen by its supporters (among whom the Poullart des Places were clearly to be numbered) as at once divine and patriarchal, and as a model for society as a whole.<sup>21</sup> The king was also the "eldest son of the Church," an identity that had been intertwined with the monarchy from the conversion of Clovis on, and by the 1690s Louis XIV had embraced the role of its protector against the threats of heresy, libertinism, schism, peace, prosperity, and common sense. And the near-total identification of family with patrimony, notably including venal offices, the wealth that obtained them, and the social standing they brought, meant that, no matter how much moralists might inveigh against avarice, ambition, and the spiritual dangers of careerism, for someone like Claude-François avoiding them was neither practically nor morally straightforward.<sup>22</sup>

Claude-François thus found himself in no position to reject the world and embrace the cloister, fearing, it seems, as Girard de Villethierry warned, that his attraction amounted to *"a fault that some individuals fall into by a love of leisure, by the desire to live a solitary life."*<sup>23</sup> Nor did he feel that it would be safe to try to live "as an honest man and even as a good man" in the world, along the lines laid down at the beginning of the century by St. François de Sales (1567–1622). This left the secular priesthood, but how was he to trust a vocation chosen almost by default?<sup>24</sup> In



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the short term, he probably had no clear answer to that question; though it did not fit the model of contemporary moralists who (as the case of Joly indicates) liked vocations to be chosen early, definitively, and completely, Claude-François must have begun his theological studies with no clear idea how he would live out his vocation once he had completed the training it required. In his struggle to detach himself honestly and without cowardice from the attractions of wealth and careerism, though, he might have had in the back of his mind council like that offered by the same Girard de Villethierry, that one mark of a true ecclesiastical vocation was that it be characterized by “*a poor and laborious benefice, ... and one that has nothing that might flatter our corrupt nature.*”<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, anyway, this was the kind of life he sought out for himself and for his companions.

One of the best reasons to believe that Claude-François remained for a long time unclear about his vocation is that if he had already known that he wanted to devote his life to missionizing the poor and neglected, and to training poor but dedicated young men to do the same, there were much more direct routes he could have taken. He might, for example, have joined the late Jean Eudes’ (1601–1680) Congregation of Jesus and Mary, which was directed towards exactly those goals, was headquartered in Caen (where Claude-François attended the Jesuit college), and which had had a strong presence in Rennes since its founder led a revival of supposedly almost Savonarolan proportions there in 1670. In 1698, just as Claude-François was embarking on his career, the Eudists took over the management of the *petit séminaire* of Rennes.<sup>26</sup> But that was just one of many alternatives. A number of other congregations all across France combined in various ways missions of education and preaching to the dispossessed—Oratorians, Lazarists, Sulpicians, and others—as did individuals and small groups working, as Poullart des Places soon would, at the diocesan level.<sup>27</sup> Though both his own spiritual development and the force of circumstances were important to the way the Congregation of the Holy Spirit came together, it was also clearly an enterprise with deep roots in contemporary sensibilities and priorities.

The seventeenth-century French obsession with education, and especially religious education, requires far more analysis than there is space for here. It was part of a larger European phenomenon—of the late Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, and proto-Enlightenment; of the Tridentine (Counter-) Reformation and the Borromean model of seminaries; of the requirements of an ever more cosmopolitan and commercial civilization. But it



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certainly seemed especially acute in France, where the competing schools of the Jesuits, the Oratory, and Port-Royal turned education into an ecclesiological battleground, where projects like Cardinal Mazarin's "College of the Four Nations" and Louis XIV's royal academies made it a matter of state, and where, by the second half of the century, both seminaries and convents largely dedicated to educating girls were being planted even in the Canadian wilderness.<sup>28</sup> In France, it seems, the general belief, spawned by the Reformation, that education was a critical tool for saving souls combined with a broad and noisy variety of pastoral and educational opinions, approaches, and institutions to produce an exceptional level of both concern and innovation. Given the context, it is easy to see why Poullart des Places would have been drawn to education as a vocation.

The relationship between the mission of education and the problem of poverty, while it clearly existed, is harder to pin down. Traditionally, education was the preserve of the well-to-do, and centuries of effort, from the time of Robert de Sorbon (1201–1274) on, to extend aid to poor students had made little dent in that reality. What changed in the seventeenth century was not so much a newfound belief in universal education, which would remain very rare well into the Enlightenment, but a growing concern, even panic, about the salvation of the unlettered. The competition between confessions after the Reformation played an important part in this change of perspective, but the discovery of the New World was probably even more significant. It is hard for us today to appreciate the impact of the sudden appearance, to Europeans who had spent a thousand years encountering non-Christians, for the most part, only as marginal figures or as Muslim warriors, of an entire world filled with millions of people who neither rejected nor combated Christianity but simply had never heard of it. To the more philosophically inclined, the New World raised the question of whether or how salvation might be available to those ignorant of Christ; the more practically minded were driven to evangelize the ignorant, leading to the surge of missionary work in the Americas and Asia that continued to mark the French church, in particular, in Poullart des Places' day.<sup>29</sup> It also changed Europeans elites' perspective on their own continent, though, as they came to see similarities between pagan "savages" and the poor, especially in the countryside, who sometimes seemed hardly more Christian.<sup>30</sup> It was by this indirect route that educating the European masses, or at least educating pastors who would serve them (for small salaries and in difficult conditions) came to be a real priority.

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*...one of the things that drew him to the ecclesiastical estate was "the inclination that I have for the poor."<sup>31</sup>*

Claude-François presumably did not think the matter through in exactly these terms. As a Christian, and above all as a priest, he was concerned with saving souls, and the souls of the poor would have seemed to him least likely to attract attention and thus most in danger—remember that Joly’s biographer had attributed exactly this attitude to him. The care of the poor and powerless was the first victim of the ambition and avarice that, as he would have feared, motivated far too many ecclesiastical careers, since the poor could provide their pastors with no material rewards, no influential connections, and little of the applause that might impress *le monde*. Thus, Poullart des Places would have seen plentiful reasons to participate in the movement to train pastors and missionaries for the poor at home and abroad. And, again like Joly, he would probably have seen men who were already relatively poor (and thus, it is worth noting, very much unlike himself) as best suited to this task, partly because of their shared experience with their prospective flocks, but mainly because they were thought best able to tolerate the low pay and poor living conditions that such work would entail: early modern Europeans had an almost Lamarkian belief in acquired characteristics of fortitude and endurance. While Claude-François probably drifted into his project of running a community of poor but dedicated theology students, it was, in this intellectual and spiritual context, both an urgent and a well-tested type of enterprise.

But there is still at least one aspect of Poullart des Places’ vocation that invites further consideration. For the poor, above all in the first years of the eighteenth century, were certainly no mere abstractions. They were human beings, and human beings with whom even elites far more sheltered than Claude-François were in continual contact. As a person and as a Christian, how did he react? By his own account, as we have seen, he was “naturally sympathetic towards the misery [or, “poverty”] of others”; one of the things that drew him to the ecclesiastical estate was “the inclination that I have for the poor.”<sup>31</sup> This hints at a level of genuine sympathy and personal connection that was rare in seventeenth-century discussions of poverty and Christian virtue. All but the most severe moralists tended to echo the sentiment of St. François de Sales, that “*to be rich in fact but poor in affection is the great happiness of the Christian, for by this means he has all the advantages of riches for this world, and the merit of poverty for the next.*” When actual poverty was valorized, it tended to be in the more general terms used for the discussion of vocation. Thus, de Sales advised his readers of two spiritual benefits of actual poverty:

*The first is that it does not come to you by your choice but purely by the will of God who has made you poor without any concurrence of your own will. Now, what we receive only from God is always most agreeable to Him, as long as we receive it with a good heart and for the love of His holy will. Where there is less of our own, there is more of God.... The second privilege of this poverty is that it is a poverty that is truly poor. Poverty that is praised, pampered, esteemed, helped, and assisted retains something of wealth, at least, it is not altogether poor; but poverty that is despised, rejected, reproached, and abandoned is truly poor.<sup>32</sup>*

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Like any vocation, poverty was to be referred to divine Providence and kept free of the contamination of ambition and the desire for social approval. Even if the poor were not seen purely instrumentally, as convenient recipients of the alms by which the wealthy could advance their salvation, poverty was presented to the elites as a *solution* to the spiritual problems their wealth and ambition posed, not as a social injustice or as the incidental condition of Christians essentially like themselves.

Though Poullart des Places, in cultivating his sympathy for the poor, would have found little guidance in contemporary literature on wealth and poverty, he might have found more such guidance in discussions of charity, which were surprisingly sparse given the practical importance of the subject. When it appears, charity seems always to be linked to the struggle against self-interestedness that we have seen so often. Thus, Jean Eudes offered a prayer for someone “*carrying out an act of charity*” that proffered it in union with Jesus’ divine love, asking him to “*annihilate in me all self-love and self-interest, and establish in me the kingdom of your divine charity.*”<sup>33</sup> In this case, charity as interior struggle seems again to short-circuit any actual relationship with the recipients, but such was not necessarily the case. According to his contemporary biographer Louis Abelly (1604–1691; he was yet another ecclesiastic whose career was in many ways reminiscent of Claude-François), St. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) once asked his followers whether, if one took someone entirely dedicated to the contemplative love of God, and “*another who loves his neighbor as well, however rude, uncultivated, and imperfect he may be, for the love of God, and who gives his entire effort to bring him to God—tell me, I ask you, which of these two loves is the more perfect and the less interested?*” This vision of missionary engagement that not just evokes but participates in divine charity, directing the impulses of self-aggrandizement to the benefit of others, must have appealed to Claude-François. At any rate, like

the founder of the Congregation of the Mission, it could be said of the founder of the Spiritans that the “*effect of this love that he had for the poor ... was to help and assist them as much as he could, which he always did, making himself the provisioner-general of the poor..., working with great effort to provide for their needs, and to furnish them with food, clothing, lodging, and the other necessities of life.*”<sup>34</sup> In the context of the time, a vocation that combined practical ministry and a kind of apostolic poverty was a logical path for a young man of wealth and standing whose ability and ambition were exceeded only by his piety.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Thomas (C.S.Sp.), attr., “Mémoire sur la vie de M. Claude-François Poullart des Places,” in Henry Koren (C.S.Sp.), ed., *The Spiritual Writings of Father Claude Francis Poullart des Places* (Louvain: Editions E. Nauwelaerts, 1959), 268: “M. des Places, avant sa conversion, n’aurait pas trouvé la pension qu’on lui donnait suffisante pour ses propres besoins: est-il converti, il en trouve assez pour lui-même et pour soulager les besoins de bien d’autres, tant la charité, quand elle est jointe à la mortification, rend ingénieux à trouver dans son nécessaire même une espèce de superflu pour le donner aux pauvres. Il souhaitait se voir un jour dépouillé de tout après avoir tout donné, et ne vivre que d’aumônes.” This is my translation, not Fr. Koren’s. The standard biography of Poullart des Places is Joseph Michel (C.S.Sp.), *Claude-François Poullart des Places, fondateur de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, 1679–1709* (Paris: Editions Saint-Paul, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Jean Girard de Villethierry, *Traité de la vocation a l’etat ecclesiastique. Nouvelle edition* (Paris: Alexis de la Roche, 1707), unpag. pref., sig. a ii r-v: “On s’engage de son propre mouvement dans les Ordres sacrez, & on les regarde comme des degrez pour monter plus haut, & pour avenir aux emplois que l’on ambitionne. On poursuit les Dignitez de l’Eglise les plus importantes; on se sert de tout son credit, & de celui de ses parens & de ses amis pour les obtenir; on use même quelquefois de pratiques tres-honteuses.” For what little is known about Girard de Villethierry, an enormously popular writer in his day, see idem, *La vie des vierges, ou les devoirs et les obligations des vierges chrétiennes. Edition de 1714*, ed. Constant Venesoen (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), preface. From the internal evidence of his works it is clear that his outlook was substantially Jansenist.

<sup>3</sup> On the place of pious works in the culture and publishing industry of the period, see Henri Jean Martin, *Print, Power, and People in Seventeenth-Century France*, trans. David Gerard (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993); Philippe Martin, *Une religion des livres, 1640–1850* (Paris: Editions du cerf, 2003), esp. 127–54 and 489–521; and most recently Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France 1580–1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 227–336. They were both the most widely printed and the most widely read form of literature in France, and by 1700 they had deeply penetrated the world of French Catholicism.

<sup>4</sup> Substantial work has already been done in tracing Claude-François' relation to the spiritual literature of his time: see in particular Joseph Michel, "Du nouveau sur les sources de la spiritualité de Poullart des Places et sur la genèse de son œuvre," which stresses the influence of the "Société de l'Aa," and Jean Orcibal, "Problèmes d'origine," in Christian de Mare (C.S.Sp.), ed., *Aux racines de l'arbre spiritain. Claude-François Poullart des Places (1679–1709): écrits et études* (Paris: Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, 1998), 101–34. I cast my net somewhat more widely than those studies, examining less canonical spiritual works that are indicative of the climate of the time rather than necessarily influential on Poullart des Places himself.

<sup>5</sup> There is a vast literature on the crisis of the turn of the eighteenth century in France, which had political, military, and intellectual as well as social and religious aspects. A few classics that have particularly shaped my outlook are Georges Pagès, *La monarchie d'ancien régime en France (de Henri IV à Louis XIV)*, 4 ed. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1946); Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680–1715*, trans. J. Lewis May (London: Hollis and Carter, 1953); and Lionel Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV: The Political and Social Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> This had been the case since early in the sixteenth century, but the wars and economic stagnation of the seventeenth century had made the situation ever more acute. The classic work on venality is Roland Mousnier, *La vénalité des offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII*, 2 ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971); on the world of finance in the seventeenth century, Daniel Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au grand siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> "M. son père, qui se voyait un bien considérable, voulait en faire un conseiller au Parlement de Bretagne. Il espérait que ce fils en qui il voyait tant de belles qualités, rendrait à sa famille son premier lustre qu'elle avait perdu par la mésintelligence etc." Thomas, "Mémoire," 242.

<sup>8</sup> *La vie et la doctrine spirituelle du pere L. Lallemant de la Compagnie de Jesus.*, ed. Pierre Champion (S.J.) (Paris: Estienne Michallet, 1694), 10–11: "amoit la pauvreté, que le monde la fuit ordinairement. Depuis qu'il se fut engagé à la suite de J. C. il ne voulut avoir à son usage, que les choses qui luy estoient précisément nécessaires, les plus viles, les plus usées, les moins commodes de la maison."

<sup>9</sup> Louis Thomassin, *Traité du negoce et de l'usure, divisé en deux parties* (Paris: Loüis Roulland, 1697), "Eloge du feu P. Thomassin auteur de ce traité," sig. 3 iii r.: "déclara ce qu'il avoit été obligé de tenir caché jusqu'alors, que le P. Thomassin lui donnoit tout les ans pour les pauvres la moitié de sa pension de mille livres.... A ces charitez secretes se joignoient plusieurs autres vertus qu'il ne cachoit pas avec moins de soin. Quoi-qu'il fût naturellement propre, il aimoit la pauvreté dans ses habits, dans ses meubles, & dans tout ce qui le regardoit, & auroit voulu n'être jamais témoin des distinctions que les dignitez de quelques-uns de ses parens leur donnent dans le monde." The only modern discussion of Thomassin's (very interesting) economic thought, Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 484–85,

merely presents him as a strawman.

<sup>10</sup> See Joseph Bergin, *Crown, Church, and Episcopate under Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 481; Pierre Clair, “La famille du père Louis Thomassin,” *Oratoriana* 11 (1965): 122–39; and idem, *Louis Thomassin (1619–1695): étude bio-bibliographique, avec vingt lettres et deux textes inédits* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Guillaume-François Joly de Fleury (1675–1756). Another distant relative, Claude Joly, was precentor in the chapter of Nôtre Dame in Paris and a substantial political propagandist in the mid-seventeenth century.

<sup>12</sup> Antoine Beaugendre (O.S.B.), *La vie de messire Benigne Joly, prestre, docteur de la Faculté de Paris, de la maison & société de Navarre, chanoine de l’église abbatiale & collegiale de S. Etienne de Dijon, instituteur des religieuses hospitalieres de la même ville, où l’on le nommoit: le pere des pauvres. Où l’on voit l’idée d’un saint chanoine, & la modele d’un parfait ecclesiastique* (Paris: Louïs Guerin, 1700), 21: “par des retraites réitérées qu’il fit en divers temps, & en divers endroits; mais il ne le fit qu’après avoir interrogé la bouche du Seigneur, c’est à dire qu’après en avoir pris l’avis des personnes les plus éclairées dans les voyes de Dieu, & particulièrement celuy de son pieux Directeur ... sans les sages conseil duquel il n’avoit garde de faire un choix aussi important qu’estoit celuy de l’estat d’où dépendoit la paix de son ame, & l’affaire de son salut éternel.”

<sup>13</sup> François Nepveu (S.J.), *Conduite chrétienne ou reglement des principales actions & des principaux devoirs de la vie chrétienne* (Paris: Louis Guerin and Jean Boudot, 1704), 300–301: “Quand on doit délibérer sur une chose aussi importante que sur le choix d’un état ou d’un employ, il est à propos de se retirer des embarras du monde & des occupations qui nous dissipent, pour faire une retraite de quelques jours; car outre qu’il faut être dans le calme & dans le repos pour faire une délibération aussi serieuse que celle-là, le Seigneur nous avertit lui-même, que c’est particulièrement dans la solitude qu’il parle au cœur, & qu’il fait connoître ses volonte.” This was very much the conventional wisdom at the time, and the Jesuits were particularly insistent on it—not surprisingly, since it came directly from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Compare e.g. the treatise of an anonymous Jesuit, *Conduite chrétienne, dans les actions principales de la vie* (Paris: R. Chevallion, 1688), 178–79.

<sup>14</sup> De Mare, *Aux racines*, 302: “que j’ai acquis une indifférence très grande pour tous les états”; 303: “assez indifférent pour les richesses”; 304: “aimant beaucoup à faire l’aumône, et compatissant naturellement à la misère d’autrui.” There is a full English translation of this document in Koren, *Spiritual Writings*, 87–113; for a brief and approachable discussion, see Christian de Mare, “Claude-François Poullart des Places: The Shaping of a Vocation,” *Spiritun Horizons* 3 (2008): 3–10.

<sup>15</sup> Jean Girard de Villethierry, *La vie des riches et pauvres, ou les obligations de ceux qui possèdent les biens de la terre, ou qui vivent dans la pauvreté, prouvées par l’Ecriture & par les saints Peres* (Paris: Charles Robustel, 1700), 45: “ils peuvent donc posséder des biens & des



heritages; mais il faut que ce soit avec un tel détachement, que leur paix n'en soit point troublée." This ideal of detachment was strongly influenced by the Christian Stoicism that was so popular in the seventeenth century, on which see Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, trans. David McKlintock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Daniello Bartoli (S.J.), *La pauvreté contente* (Paris: Edme Couterot, 1689), 256–57: "Et qui peut mieux que les riches acheter le Ciel & acquérir les vertus qui y conduisent, sur tout la charité envers les pauvres?" It must be said that Bartoli's rather extreme moral complacency helps one understand the mordancy of contemporary Jansenists; French Jesuits, though, seem not to have gone nearly as far.

<sup>17</sup> De Mare, ed., *Aux racines*, 303: "tres passionné pour la gloire et pour tout ce qui peut élever un homme au-dessus des autres par le mérite." "Merit" is a key term here: on its use in seventeenth-century French social discourse, see Jay Smith, *The Culture of Merit: Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France, 1600–1789* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); and Jotham Parsons, "Money and Merit in French Renaissance Comedy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 852–82.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Thomassin, *Traité de l'aumône, ou du bon usage des biens temporels, tant pour les laïques, que pour les ecclésiastiques* (Paris: Louïs Roulland, 1695), 136: "Car quoi-que la cupidité semble être partagée entre les honneurs, les plaisirs, & les richesses, qu'elle aime aveuglement: on peut néanmoins dire avec verité, que la seule avarice comprend tout cela, parce qu'on n'aime pas les richesses pour elles-mêmes, mais parce que ce sont les instrumens qui servent à parvenir aux honneurs du siecle & aux plaisirs de la sensualité." Thomassin was here working in an Augustinian tradition, but Aristotle and his followers had also stressed the close links between a disordered desire for money and an excessive desire for public honor.

<sup>19</sup> De Mare, ed., *Aux racines*, 305: "Mon père est vieux qui laissera après lui des affaires considérables que peu de gens que moi seront capables de mettre en ordre."; 309: "Ce dernier état n'est pas de ton goût."

<sup>20</sup> For some sixteenth-century examples, see Jotham Parsons, "Papauté, histoire, et mémoire gallicane au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 29 (2009): 315–28; Nancy Lyman Roelker, *One King, One Faith: The Parlement of Paris and the Religious Reformations of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Barbara Diefendorf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), despite numerous flaws is the only systematic study of early modern French Catholicism from this perspective.

<sup>21</sup> The classic expression of this outlook under Louis XIV was Jacques Bénigne Bossuet (bishop of Meaux), *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture*, trans. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> On venality and patrimony in the French upper classes, see Ralph Giesey, "Rules of Inheritance and Strategies of Mobility in Prerevolutionary France," *American Historical Review* 82 (1977): 271–89.

<sup>23</sup> Girard de Villethierry, *Traité de vocation*, 321: "un défaut dans lequel



quelques particuliers tombent par amour de leur repos, par le desir de mener une vie solitaire.” Compare Claude-François’ objections to his inclinations towards the cloister, de Mare, *Aux racines*, 305: “Pourtant la paresse n’aurait-elle point de part dans cette affaire...? ... Mille autres sujets de vanité ne t’engageraient-ils point à aimer la retraite?”

<sup>24</sup> De Mare, *Aux racines*, 309: “comme un honnête homme et même un homme de bien.” “Honnête homme” and “homme de bien” are almost untranslatable, though they were fundamental categories of the early modern French social understanding. “Honnêteté” was both secular virtue and the social polish appropriate to the elites; an “homme de bien” could mean either a solid citizen or simply a good man.

<sup>25</sup> Girard de Villethierry, *Traité de vocation*, 353: “un Benefice ... pauvre & laborieux, ... & qu’il n’a rien qui puisse flatter la nature corrompue.”

<sup>26</sup> See J. Meyer and B. Pocquet de Haut Jussé, “Histoire religieuse de Rennes du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in Jean Meyer et al., *Histoire de Rennes* (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1972), 185–209.

<sup>27</sup> Besides Bénigne Joly, one might point to the example of Claude Thomassin, a cousin of both the Oratorian and the bishop Louis, who founded and ran a seminary in Manosque until, in 1687, his cousin newly installed in the See turned it over to the Lazarists: see Clair, “La famille,” 130–31.

<sup>28</sup> There is an engaging look at the Ursuline experience in early Canada in Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 63–139. On the history of the Séminaire de Québec in this period, see Noël Baillargeon, *Le séminaire de Québec de 1685–1760* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1977).

<sup>29</sup> On the impact of the Age of Discovery on Europe’s religious perspective, see the important new book of Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Atlantic Iberian World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 31–42.

<sup>30</sup> On the connection between foreign and domestic missionary impulses in France, see Dominique Deslandres, *Croire et faire croire: les missions françaises au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle (1600–1650)* (Paris: Fayard, 2003). Historians now suspect that early modern Europeans, driven by zeal and ideology, were too quick to see parallels between American natives and rural Europeans, who in fact broadly shared the religious culture and beliefs of their urban and upper-class compatriots. The pioneering study in this field is William A. Christian, Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>31</sup> De Mare, *Aux racines*, 308: “l’inclination que j’ai pour les pauvres.”

<sup>32</sup> *Œuvres complètes de saint François de Sales*, 4 vols. (Paris: Bethune, 1836) 1: 509: “estre riche en effet, et pauvre d’affection, c’est le grand bon-heur du chrétien car il a par ce moyen les commoditez des richesses pour ce monde, et le merite de la pauvreté pour l’autre.”; 511–12: “Le premier est, qu’elle ne vous est point arrivée par vostre choix, mais par la seule volonté de Dieu, qui vous a faite pauvre, sans qu’il y-ait eu aucune concurrence de vostre volonté propre. Or ce que nous recevons purement de la volonté de Dieu, luy est tousjours tres-agreable pourveu que nous le recevions de bon cœur et pour l’amour de sa sainte volonté: où il y a moins du nostre, il y a plus de Dieu....

Le second privilege de ceste pauvreté, c'est qu'elle est une pauvreté vraiment pauvre. Une pauvreté louée caressée, estimée, secouruë et assistée elle tient de la richesse, elle n'est pour le moins pas du tout pauvre mais une pauvreté mesprisée, rejetaë, reprochée et abandonnée, elle est vraiment pauvre." The *Introduction à la vie dévote*, though nearly a century old when Claude-François died, was reprinted at least seven times in his lifetime.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Eudes, *La vie et le royaume de Jesus, dans les ames chrétiennes, contenant plusieurs exercices de piété, pour vivre & mourir chrétiennement & saintement, & pour former, sanctifier, faire vivre & regner Jesus dans nos ames*, "Derniere edition, revûe & corrigée" (Lyons: Antoine Besson, n.d.), 334, "*Faisant une action de Charité....* Aneantissez en moy tout amour & intérêt propre, & y établissez le Royaume de vôtre divine Charité."

<sup>34</sup> Louis Abelly, *Vie de S. Vincent de Paul, instituteur et premier supérieur général de la congrégation de la mission*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Mme. Ve. Poussielgne-Rusand, 1854) 2: 253: "une autre qui aime Dieu de tout son cœur, et qui aime aussi son prochain, quoique rude, grossier et imparfait, pour l'amour de Dieu, et qui s'emploie de tout son pouvoir pour le porter à Dieu: dites-moi, je vous prie, lequel de ces deux amours est le plus parfait et le moins intéressé?"; 2: 268: "effet de cet amour qu'il avait pour les pauvres ... était de les secourir et assister autant qu'il pouvait: ce qu'il a toujours fait, s'étant rendu comme le proviseur général des pauvres...; s'employant avec de très-grands soins pour subvenir à toute leurs nécessités, et pour leur fournir la nourriture, le vêtement, le logement, et tous les autres besoins de la vie." Abelly, like Poullart des Places, was the son of a financier; his brother began a career in the robe as an *avocat* in the Parlement of Paris while he was a curate in Paris and briefly bishop of Rodez before returning to de Paul's community. See Bergin, *Crown, Church, and Episcopate*, 365–66.